

**MARYLAND GOVERNOR’S COMMISSION ON  
AFRICAN AFFAIRS**

**Meeting Minutes**

Date: Tuesday, August 25, 2009

Time: 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Place: Banneker-Douglas Museum  
84 Franklin Street  
Annapolis, Maryland

Present: Chair Valentina I. Ikwuoma, Vice Chair Jewru Bandeh, Alex A. Agwuna, Kwaku Agyemany-Duah, Ollie P. Anderson, Jr., Mumin A. Barre, Sylvester Okey Ezeani, Yonnas K. kefle, Alfred M. Nkere, Joseph N. Offoha, Chukwuma G. Okeke, Modupe Rachel Oladapo, Eva Shaw-Taylor, Paschal Udumukwu

Absent: Tebabu Assefa, Nicholas N. Azinge, Sarian S. Bouma, Anthony Mikoyan Okolo, Adetoun Olumide, Mamadou Ibra Sy

Staff Present: Iman Awad, Agnes M. Smith

Guest Speakers: Israel (Izzy) Patoka, Director, Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI) and Governor’s Office on Inter-Governmental Affairs  
Robert Hahn, Executive Director, State Ethnic Commission  
Angela Lagdameo, Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff, GOCI, New Americans Council  
Nesreen Khashan, Partnership Specialist, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010

**I. Call to Order and Greetings**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Valentia I. Ukwuoma at 6:20 p.m.

There was an introduction of Commissioners, staff and guest.

Joni Jones, Executive Director, Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture said she was thrilled to host the inaugural meeting of the Governor's Commission on African Affairs. She noted that in the future the Commissions could partner and work together maybe on an exhibit. She again welcomed the Commission and thanked them for allowing them to host.

Chair Ukwuoma told the Commission that this is the first official meeting of the Commission although they had a Strategic Planning Meeting on June 15, 2009. The Strategic Planning Meeting was to lay out the plan for the future. Enclosed in the Commission folder was a brief summary of that meeting. Chair Ukwuoma asked the Commission to review the summary and make any suggestions and ideas during the group discussion.

## **II. Guest Speakers**

### **Robert Hahn, Executive Director, State Ethnic Commission**

Robert Hahn, Executive Director, State Ethnic Commission spoke to the Commission about how he has spoken to many of the boards and Commissions throughout State services. He appreciates the fact that they volunteer their time and effort to help the State carry out the various objectives. He said there are approximately 470 various boards and commissions throughout the State staffed by volunteers from citizens of the State. He said that sometimes they are surprised when he speaks about the ethnic laws. When you agree to serve on these boards and commissions you become a public official subject to the ethnic laws. He gave a brief history on the Ethnic Laws whose purpose was to assure the public of impartiality and independent judgement of governmental officials; to avoid improper influence or even the appearance of improper influence; and to require certain officials and employees to disclose financial affairs and to establish a minimum code of conduct. The purpose and emphasis here is what is the appearance to the public. Please keep this in mind when you attend different meetings. One of the rules are if you have a personal financial state in a matter, you should not participate. To vote on something that would benefit you personally would violate the Ethnic Law. This includes your wife, husband, children, Parents and siblings. If the party is employer to the above mentioned you should not take party too. Another restriction is conflict of interest in what you do in real life. He spoke about restrictions on gifts. A gift can not be more than \$20 like a coffee mug, pens, pencils, etc. He also told them they can not misuse prestige of position. You should not use State position to promote private activity. It is okay to include this position on your resume. He also noted that they are not to misuse confidential information. Executive Director Hahn told the Commission that there are similar procurement restrictions even after they leave State service. The website includes special information, memorandums, summaries, etc. It also talks about secondary employment. He noted that the Office wants to be pro-active.

Chair Ukwuoma asked if there were any sanctions for disobeying. Executive Director Hahn answered that they can remove a Commissioner and seek a civil fine of up to \$5,000 per incident.

### **Izzy Patoka, Director, Governor's Office of Community Initiatives Coordinator, Governor's Office of International Affairs**

Izzy Patoka, Director, Governor's Office of Community Initiatives spoke to the Commission on where they fit. He spoke about coming on board with the new Governor.

He said the way we fit in State government is unique and better than any other state in the country. He mentioned that the Governor has raised the profile on ethnic communities in a bigger way than any other governor in this State and country. When the Governor was elected two and a half years ago there were 19 State agencies that had a cabinet secretary. In addition there are seven coordinating offices which have two roles: To weave between the mass of bureaucracy and coordinate where multiple agencies are working on a similar project. He noted that the Asian and Hispanic Commissions were at the Department of Human Resources which is a social service agency, the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture was under the Department of Planning and the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs was under the Department of Housing and Community Development. Governor O'Malley said they were Governor's Commissions so they should be in the Governor's Office. He noted that it's not just the spirit of words but the spirit of mind and heart. All of the Commissions are now under the Governor's Office and if there are any new commissions, they will be under GOCI. The Executive Order has been signed and the 156 Commissioners fall under GOCI. He noted that there are no Governor's Commission on African Affairs and Governor's Commission on Middle Eastern American Affairs in any other state. The Governor has decided this is his approach for "One Maryland". He spoke about the Governor asking him to take on the Inter- Governmental Affairs role where they could build on the strength of inter governmental affairs. This is the outreach arm of the Governor's Office. Both of these community outreach mechanisms moving in sync and building strength upon each other. It has been a great opportunity for the ethnic commissions since this is at a senior staff with the Governor. He spoke about the change of Commissions themes: community development, business development, workforce development, public awareness and public education. He noted that public awareness and public education is especially important for immigrants. Director Patoka told the Commission that their charter is to bring public awareness. Director Patoka introduced GOCI present and spoke of being proud of the diversity and work of the staff. He congratulated the Commission and noted that the Governor selected the Commissions to represent him, be his ambassadors, etc. He spoke about Africa being made up of many different cultures and how important it is that each of the groups that are here is represented.

Chair Ukwuoma said it was an honor to serve and they will do their best to reach the requirements for the Commission.

**Angela Lagdameo, Special Assistant to Chief of Staff, Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, New Americans Council**

Angela Lagdameo, Special Assistant to Chief of Staff, Governor's Office of Community Initiatives spoke about how the Governor cares about the immigrant community. She gave a power point presentation which gave an overview of immigrants in Maryland. The website for the New Americans Council is: [www.newamericans.maryland.gov](http://www.newamericans.maryland.gov).

Commissioner Kwaku Agyemany-Duah spoke about immigration and how good it is to get the right folks.

Vice Chair Jewru Bandeh said that there is a need for data for the African community. He noted that most Africans fall through the cracks and are not counted. As Commissioners we need to push to get more data.

Special Assistant Lagdameo said that the good news is we have a state with a stat driven Governor.

**Nesreen Khashan, Partnership Specialist, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010**

Nesreen Khashan, Partnership Specialist, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 told the Commission that data is collected for the Census yearly through the American Community Survey. This survey is the long form where data is collected beyond the short form data collected beyond every ten years. Census 2010 is coming March 10, 2010. There are under counts in many of the communities. This is where the Commission is needed to pass along the message of the importance of filling out the Census. The Census is safe, easy and critically important. How the government distributes over \$4 billion to states is determined from the data collected from the Census. In Census 2000, Maryland had the highest rate of 67% of the country. She noted that Maryland is reaching out to the different communities so that the message of the importance of the Census is delivered.

Mr. Chuks D. Eleonu, African Peoples Action Committee, Inc., noted that the organization have started a Complete Count Committee. He noted that since there is no data, they are seeking funds, etc. The Census has been a major issue for Africans. They are working with communities, organizations, faith based, etc. They are scheduling a series of outreach on a weekly basis starting in September. He spoke to Commission about how they are already leaders. They are proposed to translate. They want to reach areas Census can't.

It was noted that the African Congress and Pan America has a Complete Count Committee. Also, Prince George's County has a Nigeria Complete Count Committee.

Partnership Specialist Khashan asked the Commission to include information for the Census at all outreach activities. She asked them to make Census something fun and comfortable for people. She reiterated that the American Community Survey provides detailed data of who we are and is yearly. It is mailed to 3 million households yearly and has a 96-98% return rate.

**III. Future Direction of the Commission**

Chair Ukwuoma spoke about the future direction of the Commission which was discussed at the Strategic Planning Meeting which was held in Howard County on June 15, 2009.

Commissioner Alfred Nkere, Chair, Business Development Sub-Committee spoke about the short and long term goals of the Committee. The Business Development Committee

goals are to identify resources to promote growth for African businesses, foster international trade and conduct a study of African exports short term. Long term goals includes promoting more business from Africa to Maryland, helping African businesses in Africa grow, etc.

Vice Chair Bandeh spoke on behalf of Commissioner Sarian Bouma, Chair, Community Development Sub-Committee in absence. He spoke about reaching out to various areas working on raising cultural awareness for African community. He said they were trying to develop an on-going database for events. There will be an area on the website where you can click and get instant updates. They will also be doing Census 2010 outreach to raise awareness, participation and partnerships. Developing partnerships is a long term goal. They would like to see more opportunity for networks and partnerships with African communities.

Commissioner Chukwuma G. Okeke, Chair, Workforce Development Sub-Committee noted that activities are contingent on what others are doing such as the Census. He spoke about one of the long term goals being to have a "Who is Who" event. Find out some of the Africans in publishing, radio, TV, etc. He noted that the Census should be published. One of the short term goals of the Workforce Development Sub-Committee is to foster more opportunities for African appointments to Maryland boards and Commissions.

Commissioner Joseph Offoha spoke on behalf of Commissioner Adetoun Olumide, Chair, Social Services Sub-Committee in absence. He said the primary focus is healthcare. The short term goal problem presented is data. If there are any data available, how authentic is it? They will be contacting minority establishments, hospitals, DHMH, etc. Another area they are looking at is the Refugees. This is the group mostly affected when it comes to income, etc. The Chair of Social Services Sub-Committee will be putting together this data and e-mailing it top rest of Commission.

Commissioner Nkere asked Director Patoka to thank the Governor for the new Commission chaired by an African. Director Patoka said he would share that information at the Senior Staff Meeting.

Vice Chair Bandeh said the Commission should take the challenge from 8:03:57 AM. Governor Anthony Brown in getting his office engaged.

David K. Lee, Director, Ethnic Commissions Division noted that the 8:05:46 AM. Governor on his initiative invited Chairs and Vice Chairs to solicit commissions to give him more opportunity to meet with communities. He wants more communication to the communities. He is relying on the Commissioners as leaders and ambassadors. Commissioners need to be the face, eyes and ears of the Governor in your respective communities.

Director Patoka announced that there will be a Joinmt Commission Assembly in December where all ethnic commissions will meet. During this Assembly, all commissions will have their individual meeting.

Commissioner Paschal Udumukwu said that the Commission needs to brainstorm since there are only six meetings a year. The Commission was encouraged to meet outside of Commission meetings through conference calls, Sub-Committee meetings, etc.

Vice Chair Bandeh noted that the next Commission meeting will be held in Montgomery or Prince George's County.

Chair Ukwuoma said that the agenda items will be sent ahead of time.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 p.m.